

*ack*

---

---

A CORRECTED COPY  
OF  
Dr. HOWE'S LETTER,  
IN  
"DAILY ADVERTISER," OCTOBER 30,  
ENTITLED  
"A PLEA, ALIKE IN BEHALF OF OUR PAUPER LUNATICS AND  
OF OUR TAX PAYERS."

---

---



## LETTER.

---

*To the Editors of the Boston Daily Advertiser :*

My official duty as member of the Board of State Charities, and of the board of trustees of the Massachusetts General Hospital, makes me familiar with the conditions and wants of the unfortunate insane. I trust that I do not lack either sympathy in their suffering, or desire to lighten their burdens.

My duty as a citizen makes me familiar with the condition and wants of our "heavy-laden" tax-payers; and I know that I do not lack either sympathy in their sufferings, or desire to lighten their burdens.

I therefore crave leave to say a word upon the revival of the preposterous project to build a palatial structure for our insane paupers in the town of Winthrop.

There are upon an average, in our prosperous and generally happy community, from one hundred to two hundred unfortunate lunatics for whom we are bound, legally and morally, to provide skilful treatment and comfortable support. This number will not decrease in our generation. On the contrary, it will grow with our growth. Some of them are old, chronic and harmless persons. About twenty-five per cent. of them may be improved by skilful medical and moral treatment; a few, not more than a score at present, require the

restraint of a close asylum ; the others, or about one-half of the whole, might be kept in small country houses, under proper supervision, more happily for themselves, and far more economically than in the most costly asylum upon the congregate system.

The present city lunatic hospital is not, and cannot be made, a first-rate establishment, either for the medical treatment or for the comfortable dwelling of so many inmates as are now crowded into it. But those who have been shocked by report of the wretched condition of our insane may be comforted by the assurance of an eye-witness, that they are well fed, well clad, well lodged and kindly treated. The hospital is clean, well ordered and wisely administered. The only crying want is lack of room. The superintendent, in his last report, says :

“ The wards are all lighted by gas, and have suitable chairs, tables and pictures. The best wards have carpets and upholstered furniture and birds and engravings, and each room a nice bedstead, with mattresses and feather pillows, one rocker and one common chair, a bureau, a washstand, a mirror, a work-table, and a curtain to the window and a carpet. Two pianos, a Mason & Hamlin organ, a library of nearly eight hundred volumes, a magic lantern, a magic repertory, two billiard tables, a bagatelle board, a bowling alley, a superior hand-organ, a green-house and bird cages, newspapers and magazines add to our means for amusement. Weekly social parties, the observance of all *holidays*, attendance upon concerts, lectures, theatres and fairs, and the menagerie and circus, excursions by water and occasional attendance at church in the city, break up the enervating monotony of hospital life.”

Notwithstanding this pleasant picture, I insist that we ought, forthwith, to provide larger and better accommodations for our pauper lunatics.

Does it follow, then, that we are bound in duty to build a new hospital? Certainly not, except as a matter of civic ostentation; and I submit that we have monuments enough for that already. Laudable as may be the ambition of those who desire to embellish the neighborhood with another palatial building, and of those who covet the honor of managing it when built, they ought not at this time to be gratified; because,—

First, the city *has paid for, and virtually owns hospital accommodations for more lunatics than she now has, or will have for a long time!* The State of Massachusetts has built three spacious hospitals, and provided them with the best accommodations for the medical treatment and the care of lunatics; and one receptacle for two hundred and fifty incurable pauper insane, at an expense of about \$900,000. Of this, the proportion paid by the city of Boston was about \$344,000. The annual interest on this, at 7 per cent., is \$24,000, and it ought to be reckoned in estimating the real cost of supporting our city pauper lunatics.

Any number of our pauper lunatics at South Boston might be committed by legal process to the State hospitals; and the trustees would not refuse to admit them, for the law is imperative: “*Any* of the judges of the supreme judicial, superior and probate courts, and *in the city of Boston*, of the police court, may commit to either of the state lunatic hospitals any insane person who, in their opinion, is a proper subject.” The State is disposed to accommodate pauper lunatics; and at this moment is enlarging the receptacle at Tewksbury to receive 150 more patients. The legislature appropriated \$25,000 this very year, for the purpose; and Boston paid more than a third of it.



Doubtless the State would do more in this direction, if it were shown to be necessary.

In virtue of her large investment Boston might claim admission for every one of her paupers into those magnificent establishments, and secure for them skilful and kind treatment by paying \$3.50 a week per patient. They now cost her \$5.65 each per week in the city hospital, without reckoning interest on investment. If the proposed hospital at Winthrop is built, it will cost *at least* half a million; probably nearer three-quarters of a million; and the interest on that sum, with the increased expenses of such a vast establishment, divided among the patients, will make the weekly cost for our pauper lunatics more than twelve dollars; which is only a fraction less than the average cost of the elegant and luxurious accommodations furnished to mad ladies and gentlemen at Somerville.

The only offset to the cost will be the profit on private boarders; but does Boston want to enter upon the business of keeping a mad-house for gain?

Whenever I visit the State hospitals, as member of the Board of Charities, and see how superior the accommodations, especially those out of doors, are to those at South Boston, I am sorely perplexed to understand why our city government does not immediately remove a part of our lunatics, and distribute them among the State hospitals. This would instantly bring the relief and the comfort so clamored for at South Boston.

Moreover, I am perplexed to understand why the directors, who complain that the present accommodations are not fit for paupers, persist in taking private and paying patients. They have now about thirty such, and receive over \$5,000 for their board.

I am not one of those who suspect that our lunatics are retained in their crowded and poor quarters in order to strengthen the appeal for a new hospital. Among those who make it are estimable and honorable, though sadly mistaken, gentlemen.

Charity suggests that the city authorities do not understand this matter. I am sure that few of my fellow-citizens do; and I will close this communication by explaining it.

The State hospitals can, by much less crowding than is necessary at South Boston, accommodate from 1,300 to 1,400 and the State receptacle 250 patients. The highest number at any one time this year, in the three hospitals, was 1,326.

The trustees are bound by law to admit,—

*First.* State pauper lunatics, at the rate of \$3.50 a week, to be paid into the treasury of the hospital, and out of the State treasury, Boston of course supplying one-third of the funds. There are now, 346 of this class, and their cost, at \$3.50 a week, is \$62,972 a year, of which Boston pays about 37 per cent. So that, besides having paid her full share of the cost of the buildings, she pays about \$23,000 a year towards their current expenses. *Second.* All town pauper lunatics, at the rate of \$3.50 a week, paid by the towns which send them. *Third.* Lunatics belonging to Massachusetts may be admitted upon their friends paying five dollars a week and upward, according to their means. If there be still any vacant places, the trustees may (or they do) admit paying patients from other States; the rate to be fixed by the trustees.

This income goes to pay the current expenses of the hospitals. Whenever extra funds are wanted, as for

building enlarged accommodations, the legislature makes a special appropriation, of which Boston pays about one-third.

The three State hospitals contained, at the date of the last published reports, of the first class, or State paupers, 405; of the second class, or paupers belonging to towns and cities, 285; in all, 790; leaving 510 vacant places, some of which the pauper lunatics of Boston might take. But as they do not, the trustees receive private patients, from within and without the State. The number of these was 276; in all, 1,066, or 200 less than could be received by close crowding. By the returns of this month, the State hospitals are filled as follows:—

	State Paupers.	Town Paupers.	Private Patients.
Worcester, . . . .	29	214	170
Taunton, . . . .	104	205	76
Northampton, . . . .	213	87	116
	346	506	362
Total, . . . . .			1,214

But we must deduct from the number in the Worcester hospital about fifty patients, who are living very comfortable in little farm-houses in the neighborhood. This leaves in the hospital only 343 patients; while it has had at one time in this year, 463.

This policy of placing out a certain number of our harmless lunatics will doubtless be further acted upon, and will give more room in the hospitals.

We have seen that at one time in this year the three hospitals contained 1,326 patients; they have now 112



less. Surely they could receive some more without complaint. But, moreover, of the present number, 1,214, there are 52 paying patients *who do not belong to Massachusetts!* If they were removed, and fifty of our lunatics put in their places, our hospitals would be relieved, and no inhabitant of the State incommoded.

*All patients are treated alike* in our State hospitals; that is, according to their condition and wants as lunatics; and since the accommodations are sought and paid for by our respectable farmers, mechanics and tradesmen, they are surely good enough for the pauper lunatics of Boston.

The trustees of the hospitals are selected by the governor and council, who always appoint a full proportion of citizens of Boston. Thus our lunatics would be under care of their fellow-citizens, who, being selected for the purpose, are, to say the least, as well qualified for the duty as the present directors.

The hospitals at Worcester and at Taunton are even more accessible, at most times, to the friends of the patients, than one at Winthrop would be.

Our lunatics at the South Boston hospital cost us about \$2.15 per week more than they would cost us if we should send them to the State hospitals. This is a fraction short of \$25,000 a year for the civic ostentation of running a city hospital, which gives our unfortunate lunatics inferior accommodations.

In behalf of our insane, and in behalf of our tax-payers, I plead that this be changed; that the first may have better accommodations, and the second may have smaller bills.

Finally, I recommend that rather than build such a hospital as is proposed, some of our pauper lunatics be transferred to the State hospitals, so as to relieve for the

present the pressure for room at South Boston. I do this reluctantly, because I would prefer rather to lessen than increase the number of patients in the State hospitals. But it would give a relief to Boston, which she has a clear right to claim; and it would more nearly equalize the public accommodations of the insane of all the State.

Moreover it will give time to settle deliberately whether it is not best to abandon our independent city hospital for pauper lunatics; and to make more suitable arrangement for their comfortable support at the State hospitals.

But in any case, there are many strong reasons which show,—

*First.* That it is questionable whether Boston ought to maintain a lunatic hospital at all. The State, in her sovereign capacity, is the guardian of all adult idiots and lunatics; and she cannot properly divest herself of all responsibility for her wards, nor give it, even to their parents; much less to corporations. It is her duty to see to their comfort, and to secure their rights; sometimes, alas! against their blood relatives. County or city establishments for lunatics are only little less objectionable than private mad-houses. But I have no time here to enlarge upon this matter, so important, but so little considered.

*Second.* That there is not now any pressing want of a new city hospital.

*Third.* That Boston should never construct one upon the proposed extensive and costly plan, because (among other reasons) that plan will not admit of the establishment being administered upon the improved methods which are *so rapidly superseding the antiquated congregate close asylum system.*

*Fourth.* That she should never build a hospital at Winthrop, unless she wishes a monument to show the folly of haste and ambition; and to prove that insanity, in the mild form of building mania, is liable to prevail in a City-Hall which utterly lacks the means of ventilation.

SAM'L G. HOWE.

NOVEMBER 4, 1871.

